



Disaster Preparedness *For Seniors*



Emergencies and disasters can strike anyone, anytime and anywhere. They can happen quickly and without warning and can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or confine you to your home.

Local officials and relief workers will be responding quickly after a disaster, but they can't reach everyone right away. Knowing what to do is your best protection.

Disasters and emergencies can create special challenges for seniors. You might not be quite as agile as you used to be; you might use a cane, walker or wheelchair; or you might have vision or hearing difficulties. Whatever your limitations, you need to be prepared to handle an emergency. This brochure covers many of the steps seniors should take to plan for emergencies.



1. Understand What Can Happen

When Disaster Strikes

- There can be significant damage and loss of life.
- Health and mental health resources can be overwhelmed.
- Media coverage and public fear can continue for a prolonged period.
- Public facilities, workplaces and schools might close. Officials might restrict travel.
- You might have to evacuate to a designated location or remain where you are for an extended period of time.
- Cleanup might take months.
- Water, food or medicine might be contaminated.

Look Around Where You Live

Virginians experience hurricanes, winter storms, thunderstorms, toxic spills, earthquakes, tornadoes, flooding, fires and terrorist acts. Look around where you live. Do you live near a highway where a hazardous material spill could occur? Are you in a flood-prone area? Ask yourself what emergencies or disasters could occur in your area and learn about your community's disaster plans.



- **Does your apartment complex, assisted living facility or nursing home have emergency plans? Be sure you know where to find the emergency exits, especially if you live in a high-rise building.**

Community Warning Signals

If your community has warning systems, know what they sound like and what to do when you hear them. Keep a battery-powered radio and extra batteries handy so you can get much-needed information in an emergency, even if the power is out. Listen to your local emergency alert system radio or television station. Some communities use “Reverse 911” systems that automatically dial telephones in the affected area and play a recorded message that tells you what to do. NOAA Weather Radios are also a valuable source of information.

- ▶ **If someone in the household is hearing-impaired, they might have difficulty hearing sirens or other types of alerts. In such cases, consider purchasing an alert system that features a visual signal, and make special arrangements ahead of time through local emergency management officials. People who need special help or transportation during an evacuation should register with local government officials, who can offer advice about what to do during an evacuation.**

2. Create a Disaster Plan

Talk With Others

Discuss with your family, friends and neighbors the types of disasters and emergencies that are most likely to happen and what to do in each case. Take a first aid, CPR, Citizen Emergency Response Team or other class so that you have the knowledge to help yourself and others if needed.

- ▶ **If children visit, explain potential hazards to them and ask them to share responsibilities. Teach those who might need to assist you in an emergency how to operate necessary equipment. Know your neighbors and consider how they can assist you if needed. If you use a home health care service, discuss emergency procedures with your service representative.**

Determine Where to Meet

If you need to leave your home in an emergency, decide in advance where you and your family will meet in case you can't

return home. Keep a record of the location, its phone number and the phone numbers of your family with you at all times. Keep a travel kit packed with comfortable, sturdy shoes and clothing, extra eyeglasses and at least a week's supply of medications if needed.

Have an Out-Of-Town Contact

Often it's easier to call long distance after a disaster, so ask an out-of-town friend or relative to be your contact in case of an emergency. All family members should call this person in an emergency to check in.

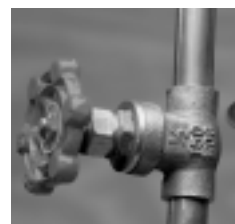
When an Emergency Occurs:

- Follow your plan.
- Listen to local radio or television for information about what you should do.
- Be prepared to evacuate your home if authorities instruct you to do so.
- Check for fires, electrical or other household hazards.
- Check on your neighbors.
- Call your family contact to check in.
- Avoid driving except to evacuate. Be alert for road hazards, such as flooding. Never drive through floodwaters; they might be deep enough to carry your vehicle away.

3. Important Preparedness Tips: What You Need to Know

Utilities

Know how, where and when to turn off water, gas and electricity in your home. Only turn off utilities if authorities instruct you to do so or if you suspect damaged lines. If you do turn off your utilities, do not turn them on again by yourself. You will need a professional to turn them back on.



- **If you feel you might not be able to turn off utilities yourself, arrange for someone, such as a neighbor, to help you. Post emergency numbers for utility companies by your phone, such as water and sewer, electricity and gas.**

If Electricity is Lost

- Notify the power company immediately if you and your neighbors have lost power.
- Use a flashlight, not candles or kerosene lanterns, which are fire hazards.
- Keep a traditional, non-cordless telephone available; it doesn't require household electricity to operate.
- Turn off all major appliances.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- If you have a portable generator, only use it outside in a well-ventilated area, away from doors and windows.
- In cold weather, be prepared to drain water lines, pumps, supply lines and boilers because they can freeze and burst when power is lost.

- **Provide your power company with a list of all life-support equipment required by you or members of your household. Obtain an alternate power source for the equipment.**

Insurance Coverage

Homeowners' insurance typically does not cover flood damage. If you live in an area that's prone to flooding, talk to your insurance agent about purchasing flood insurance. Make a visual or written record of your home and possessions to help you claim losses in the event of damage. Keep these and other vital records in one location in a waterproof container.



Emergency Supplies

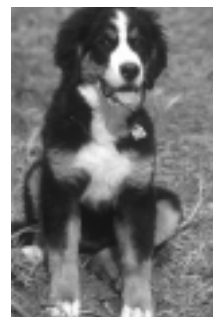
Have enough supplies on hand to last at least three days for each family member. For those with budgetary concerns, collect these supplies over time. Be sure to label items with your name, address and phone number and the name and phone number of your emergency contact.

- One gallon of water per person, per day and food that won't spoil, like canned goods. Include a manual can opener.
- Emergency tools such as a battery-powered radio, flashlight and extra batteries.
- First aid kit that includes a list of any allergies and contact lenses or an extra pair of glasses.
- At least a week's supply of medications.
- Sanitation supplies including: toilet paper, soap, plastic garbage bags and personal hygiene supplies.
- A change of clothing, footwear and blanket or sleeping bag.
- Extra set of car keys; cash in small denominations or traveler's checks.
- Special items for infant, elderly or disabled family members.

- **When assembling your emergency kit, be sure it's not too heavy or bulky for you to carry. You might need to store items in more than one container or a suitcase with wheels. You'll also want to make sure you have contact numbers for your pharmacy and medical supply providers if you require oxygen, dialysis supplies, diabetes supplies, etc.**

Have an Emergency Plan for Your Pets

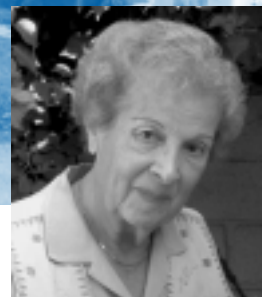
Due to health regulations, most emergency shelters will not accept pets other than service animals. Talk to your veterinarian or local humane society in advance about an emergency plan for your pets, or plan to shelter in the home of family or friends or in a motel.



4. When the Disaster is Over

Once the immediate danger is past, it might take weeks or even months for you and your community to recover. Here are some steps you should take as soon as the disaster has passed.

- If you evacuated, be careful when you return home. Structural damage and mold from flooding can cause health risks. Be alert for snakes and other wild animals that could have taken refuge in your home during the disaster.
- Contact your insurance company if your home is damaged.
- If your area is declared a federal disaster area, you might be eligible for assistance such as temporary housing, help with uninsured home repairs, etc. Listen to local news for instructions about how to apply for assistance.



- **Following an emergency, some people try to take advantage of those affected by disaster through price gouging and other scams. These people often target seniors. Be alert for such illegal activity. If you suspect someone is trying to take advantage of you, report it to the Federal Trade Commission at 1-877-382-4357 or to the Better Business Bureau.**

For More Information Visit These Web Sites:

The Virginia Department of
Emergency Management:

www.vaemergency.com

(Your most up-to-date Web source for
emergency information)

The Virginia Department of Health:

www.vdh.state.va.us

The Federal Emergency
Management Agency:

www.fema.gov

American Red Cross:

www.redcross.org



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